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THE INTERPRETATION OF LUTHER
IN MODERN SWEDISH THEOLOGY

A PART OF A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF THE
DIVINITY SCHOOL IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE
OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

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I. Purpose and Procedure

The purpose of this study is to discover and define the distinctive Swedish type of Luther interpretation. The principal sources for such a definition are the numerous studies to which the Luther renaissance in Sweden has given rise, but the whole theological production of the present century is involved. The relation between Luther research and systematic theology is so close that it is difficult to differentiate between them.

The modern Swedish interpretation of Luther can not be understood apart from the Swedish Lutheran tradition out of which it has come. For this reason it is necessary in the first chapter to inquire into the character of that tradition. At several points the Reformation movement and its subsequent development differ significantly from their counterparts in Germany. In the second chapter the Swedish Luther literature is analyzed against this distinctive Swedish background. In order to give a total picture of the Swedish type, it has seemed best to present the findings of Swedish Luther research around certain dominating centers of interest rather than around individual students who have made notable contributions. The unity and consistency of Swedish research allows such treatment without injustice to the individual students or to the ideas which they present. In the third chapter this relatively coherent pattern of interpretation is set in relation

to recent German Luther research in order to ascertain the originality and the distinctiveness of the Swedish type. This involves tracing the evidences of Swedish dependence upon German research and comparing the structure of the Swedish type with five leading German types of interpretation. As a result of this comparison, there emerge five characteristic features of the Swedish interpretative pattern which have no exact parallels in German research. In the final chapter an attempt is made to evaluate these distinctive features.

II. The Indigenous Character of Swedish Luther Research

The Swedish interpretation of Luther is not solely the product of recent research in Luther's theology. It is in part the product of a tradition which builds directly on the creative insights of the Reformation and which has preserved these insights quite consistently throughout its history.

The primary impulses toward reformation came from close contact with the early Reformation movement in Germany, but the Swedish movement developed an individuality which entitles it to independent treatment and evaluation. It is important to note that the Reformation came to Sweden at a very early date. Olavus Petri, the Swedish reformer, studied at Wittenberg from 1516 to 1518 and returned to his homeland the following year. There is no evidence of subsequent communications between Olavus and Luther. By 1523 the new Swedish nation, having just gained its independence from Denmark, virtually severed relations with Rome. By 1530 the ecclesiastical transformation of Sweden was an accomplished fact. It was, therefore, the first national church to embrace the Reformation position.

The early arrival of the Reformation to Sweden and its speedy success have important consequences in the character of the Swedish Reformation. It was not a movement but a position which was transferred to Sweden. It was the evangelical interpretation of Christianity rather than Luther that was accepted by the Swedish nation. There is no reference to Luther in the literature of the Reformation before 1540-1541. In the Bible translation which came out in those years, dependence upon Luther's translation instead of the Vulgate is acknowledged. Furthermore, the Swed-

ish Reformation never became factional or separatistic. In 1518, and for almost a decade afterwards, the Reformation in Germany represented a fairly united front. That continued to be the case in Sweden. There is no counterpart to Luther's break with Erasmus and the humanists, the Marburg Colloquy, or the anti-sectarian emphasis in the later phases of the Reformation in Germany.

There are two factors of national origin, neither of which has any necessary connection with Luther, which affected the character of the Reformation in Sweden. There was no conscious break with medievalism. Evangelical bishops took the place of Roman bishops as these died or left the country. The Swedish church can establish its claim to apostolic succession, though it has never been inclined to attach any particular importance to it. The orderly transformation of the church made it possible to preserve many of the values of medievalism which were lost in the heat of controversy in Germany. Another factor of significance is the close correlation between the Reformation and national independence. The Roman hierarchy was actively sympathetic to the Danish overlords. It was partly national interest which determined that Gustavus Vasa, the leader of the independence movement, should be in sympathy with the Reformation and its protest against Rome. The struggle to preserve Swedish independence has frequently also been a struggle in behalf of Protestantism, as in the Thirty Years War. The close association between national and religious interest has given the evangelical faith a firm place in Swedish national life. The life of the citizen and the life of the believer have been intimately related to one another.

The Swedish Reformation was distinctive, also, in the comparative absence of two factors which were of decisive importance in Germany. It was largely spared the controversies which gave rise to the confessions, and Melancthon never enjoyed the popularity in Sweden which he did in Germany. No confessional statement was adopted by the Swedish church until 1593 when the Augsburg Confession was approved as the statement of its faith. Luther's *Small Catechism* was given symbolic status in the constitutions of 1634 and 1772. The rest of the confessional writings have never been officially endorsed as symbolic writings in the strict sense of the term. The importance of this fact does not lie in the possi-

bility of establishing doctrinal disagreement with the stand taken by the confessions but in the characteristic Swedish attitude toward them. They are regarded as witnesses of the faith, called forth by particular historical circumstances in Germany, deserving consideration from the Christians of other lands, but they are not considered to be regulative statements having the character of law.

Melanchthon was not without supporters in Sweden, but a number of factors conspired against him. The early reformers left an indelible stamp on the subsequent development of the church and not even Melanchthon could successfully compete with them. Moreover, those who appealed to him usually occupied unpopular positions in Sweden. The clergy with Catholic or Calvinistic inclinations became his most ardent champions. This did little to commend him to the church in general at a time when it was keenly sensitive to serious threats from both of these directions. The royal house was receptive to Melanchthonian ideas and used them in its attempt to subjugate the church. This further discredited him in the estimation of a democratically inclined church and nation.

The subsequent development of Swedish Lutheranism has also moved in a somewhat different path from that which German Lutheranism has followed. It will suffice to indicate a few of its distinguishing characteristics. Practically all of the German theological movements—Orthodoxy, Pietism, Rationalism, New-Humanism—have had somewhat tardy counterparts in Sweden. None of them, however, has gone to the extremes which characterized it in the land of its origin. All of them have been neutralized to a considerable extent by the enduring Reformation tradition. Another characteristic of the Swedish development is the close association between the church and the centers of education. Theological research has been in the service of the church. There has never developed a cleavage between education and the church such as has sometimes characterized the German situation. Closely related to this is the intellectual emphasis in the church's ministry. It has centered around the proclamation of the Christian message rather than around emotion, aesthetics, organization, or activism. There are two implications of the Reformation faith which have entered into the life and thought of the Swedish church to a degree

not found elsewhere. These are the idea of the Christian "calling" and the concept of the folk-church. The former involves the conviction that the believer is to work out his faith in the particular calling in which he finds himself; the faith of the individual expresses itself in the character of his daily work. The folk-church concept may be regarded as the equivalent of the idea of the "calling" in community and national life. The church includes the total community and is to exercise an influence upon it such as individual faith exercises upon the total life of the individual. A final fact which should be noted is that the Swedish church has been relatively free from political control. It has on more than one occasion been the champion of the people against absolutist attempts on the part of the monarchs. A single incident may be considered typical. When the Swedish church declared its Lutheran character at the Uppsala Meeting in 1593, a Roman Catholic was nominal king and a Calvinistic prince was regent. An English historian has called this a step without parallel in history.

We have briefly sketched the character of the Swedish tradition out of which the modern Luther interpretation has come, and which has, to some extent, conditioned its general pattern. There are two other types of conditioning factors which must be noted. One is concerned with conditions during the latter half of the nineteenth century which forced Swedish theologians to face certain issues of fundamental importance. The other involves dominant theological movements which were favorably received in Sweden because they seemed to offer some help in dealing with these issues.

There are particularly two problems which came to the fore as a result of social, cultural, economic, and intellectual developments around the middle of the nineteenth century. These are the essential nature of Christianity and the nature of the church. The former arose out of a controversy regarding education which resulted in the folk-school statute of 1842. In defining the relation between Christianity and education and between Christianity and culture generally, Swedish theology was forced to face the question of the fundamental nature of Christianity, or, otherwise stated, the nature of revelation. The second issue arose out of the awakenings which took place in the forties and fifties and which

advocated the free association of believers as a substitute for the folk-church concept. In the face of these problems it is not surprising that Schleiermacher should have been welcomed by the theologians of Lund or that Ritschl's "kingdom of God" theology should have engaged the interest of the younger men at the turn of the century.

During the nineteenth century the University of Uppsala was comparatively free from outside influence, but this was not the case at the University of Lund. Every German theological movement had its representative. Kant, Schleiermacher, Hegel, Ritschl, and Herrmann were the dominant influences. The incentive for revitalized Luther research undoubtedly came from Ritschl. Pehr Eklund, the leading theological figure at Lund during the nineties, may be regarded as the starting point for the Swedish Luther renaissance. Söderblom was much influenced by him. Both were influenced by Ritschl. When Söderblom came to Uppsala in 1901, the spearhead of Luther research moved from Lund to Uppsala. Together with Einar Billing, he is largely responsible for the spirit and vitality which characterizes the modern movement. Gustaf Aulén studied at Uppsala and instructed in theology there for seven years. In 1913 he became professor of systematic theology at Lund, and the center of Luther research moved with him. Through Anders Nygren, Ragnar Bring, Hjalmar Lindroth, and several other younger followers, his influence has been far-reaching. Aulén's position in Sweden has been compared to that of Holl in Germany. Uppsala theologians have continued energetic and scholarly Luther study, but the most original and creative work has been done at Lund.

The significance of this historical background for the Swedish interpretation of Luther may be briefly summed up as follows: The "back to Luther" movement in Sweden did not have far to go. The Swedish church has quite consistently leaned upon Luther and the early Reformation position rather than upon Melancthon and the period of Orthodoxy. The characteristic emphasis upon the Word, the church, and the "calling" makes an interpretation of Luther which centers around these doctrines an entirely natural development. In view of the close relationship which has always existed between the church and education, it is

not surprising that the Luther renaissance, the theological revival, and the modern "church-awakening" should be so closely related. The relative freedom from Orthodoxy's formulation of Luther's theology and its verbal inspiration theory of the Scriptures has made possible an objective approach to Luther as well as to any particular formulation of the faith of the church.

III. *Luther as He Appears to Swedish Research*

The development of systematic theology and the history of Luther research in Sweden are practically indistinguishable. Every theologian of distinction during the present century has also been a recognized student of Luther. This creates a special problem in the analysis of Swedish Luther interpretation. It is difficult, if not impossible, to determine to what extent the correlative systematic positions are derived from Luther and to what extent they determine the interpretation of his theology. It is, nevertheless, necessary to indicate some of the characteristic emphases in Swedish theology in order to be aware of the points at which the interpretation of Luther may be expected to be most heavily weighted.

The concept of revelation is basic in Swedish theology whether viewed historically or systematically. Revelation is dynamic in distinction from all static historicism. God reveals Himself to me in the present moment though He reveals Himself through the historical Christ-deed. Christ is not merely an event in the stream of revelation; He is the Lord of revelation. Dynamic revelation does not, therefore, imply an evolutionistic interpretation of God's activity. Rather, it must be understood in a dramatic-dualistic way. God reveals Himself as active against all that opposes Him. The human personality is a battleground on which God is arraigned against all that challenges His dominion. He reveals Himself only as He overcomes these hostile forces and produces faith.

The church comes into being as a result of God's dynamic and redemptive activity. It is not an institution possessing independent authority over the lives of its members nor is it an association of like-minded people. It is a fellowship between men and God, created by the gospel. Therefore the gospel is the constitutive factor in the church. The Word of God is the constant, living witness

of the church to God's redemptive activity—its testimony concerning the Christ-deed. Because the Word must be proclaimed and the sacraments administered, the church becomes a visible reality possessing an institutional character, but without boundaries.

The doctrine of the "calling," previously mentioned, is the third fundamental idea in Swedish theology. It constitutes the point at which Christian faith penetrates the social order. Like the folk-church idea, this is not something new in Swedish thought. The more original interpretation of revelation, however, has given a new and deeper meaning to each of them.

Before entering upon the analysis of Swedish Luther interpretation, it is necessary to describe the Swedish method. "Motif-research" is one of the most significant features of Swedish theology and Luther study. In its simplest form the search for the motif is a search for the meaning behind the form of expression. It is an attempt to discover the affirmation which gave rise to the particular statement of doctrine. The statement itself is determined by the thought-forms of the day and the positions which it seeks to exclude. In order to arrive at the positive content of faith as expressed in any historical theological position, it is necessary to find the basic or central affirmation in the light of which each particular doctrine is to be understood and which gives unity and coherence to the whole. This central affirmation is the "basic-motif." It may be described as a fundamental answer to a fundamental question. Nygren holds that the fundamental question for Christianity and for any religion from which it needs to be distinguished is: How does man come into fellowship with God? The answer must arise out of the nature of Christianity itself as historically revealed and as empirically known. When the answer has been found and scientifically tested, just as the scientist tests his hypothesis, all the various theological doctrines must be interpreted in the light of this basic-motif. The method is applied to Luther with fruitful results.

Motif-research involves a combined historical-systematic approach. The materials for theology are historically given in the living stream of revelation, but these must be systematically inter-

preted. The method itself directs attention to Luther as one who understood and interpreted evangelical Christianity. His importance, however, does not lie in his personality or his religious experience but in the gospel which he proclaimed.

There are six particular areas of interest which may properly serve as points of concentration for the presentation of the Swedish analysis of Luther's theology. The first of these is the dualistic background of his thought. Söderblom is largely responsible for the introduction of dualism into Swedish theology. It was something of a novelty in 1903 when he asserted that the shift from "the monism of the prophets to the dualism of the Gospels" is one of the most significant developments in "revealed religion."¹ It has long since come to possess the dignity of an established fact, if not of a tradition. It involves much more than the claim that Luther believed in the devil. Swedish research interprets all of Luther against the dualistic background. It is unwilling to grant that this element in his theology is merely a reflection of the mythology of his time. As Luther sees it, there is a concentration of demonic activity against the Word and the progress of God's kingdom. The conflict between God and the devil is basically a conflict between faith and unbelief in the human soul. Luther is concerned with the activity of the devil in men rather than around men. The devil seeks to undo the work of grace, destroy faith, and create unbelief. It is his purpose to persuade the conscience-stricken sinner that God is hostile to him. The devil may, therefore, at times be regarded as almost synonymous with the God of wrath.

The importance of dualism for the Swedish view may be best indicated by observing its relation to the interpretation of the doctrines of sin and justification. The essential nature of sin is egocentricity. To be egocentric is to be in rebellion against God. There are three sets of antithesis which may be regarded as the subjective counterparts of the antithesis between God and the devil. These are: flesh and spirit, old man and new man, and unbelief and faith. Flesh, old man, and unbelief are expressions of egocentricity. Spirit, new man, and faith are expressions of theocentricity. Runestam, Ljunggren, and Bring have made extensive studies of Luther's conception of flesh and spirit and all

agree that these terms do not refer to a higher and lower nature in man. They are total views of man—that is, man is either totally flesh or totally spirit. As flesh, he is ruled by the devil; as spirit, he is ruled by God. To be ruled by the devil is identical with self-rule. The same holds true with respect to the correlative antitheses between old man and new man and between unbelief and faith.

However, man is never totally spirit. Justification does not mean that he ceases to be flesh. Egocentricity is an enduring reality. The believer is both flesh and spirit, both old man and new man, subject to the aggressive activity of both God and the devil. Therefore the life of faith is a life of constant becoming. One is never in reality a new person except as he is constantly becoming a new person. He transcends his egocentricity only as he accepts forgiveness. Sin and grace are not to be interpreted as two chronologically, or even psychologically, distinguishable stages in man's experience but as two elements involved in the same moment of experience. He is at the same time justified and a sinner.

These two doctrines suffice to show the importance of dualism for the Swedish interpretation of Luther. One additional implication, however, deserves mention. Luther's *Bondage of the Will* has received considerable attention from Swedish students. They find much support in it for their dualistic interpretation but they are also confronted by a problem inasmuch as Luther here asserts God's omnipotence in a most unqualified manner. Until quite recently this feature of the work was regarded as a remnant of nominalistic voluntarism which could not be integrally related to Luther's view. Bring, in *Dualismen hos Luther* (Dualism in Luther), offers an interpretation which does not require this sort of a concession. Briefly stated, it is this: The law demands a spontaneous surrender of the self to God but it does not produce such a surrender. On the contrary, it incites man's egocentricity to further striving in order to render God favorably disposed toward him so that he may enjoy the blessings which He promises. Egocentricity which seeks to make God man's servant is diabolical. The wrath of God produces the same effect in man. Hence the law and the wrath of God may properly be described as instruments of the devil though they proceed from God and are expres-

sions of the divine will. It is in this sense that God may be said to work the evil which is, at the same time, the work of the devil.

The second center of interest in the Swedish analysis is the doctrine of the atonement viewed as God's decisive victory. This interpretation has its roots in Einar Billing's work, *Försoningen* ("The Atonement"), published in 1908, but it has received its most complete formulation in Aulén's *Olavus Petri Lectures* published in English under the title of *Christus Victor*. In this work Aulén delineates an interpretation of the atonement which can not be incorporated within the framework of either the subjective view or the forensic interpretation of Christ's death as a satisfaction offered to God in behalf of man. He calls it the "classic type" of atonement theory. It characterizes the New Testament interpretation and is to be found in an enduring tradition through the early Fathers and well into the medieval period. The distinguishing feature of the classic view is its dramatic character. God carries through the work of the atonement by himself engaging the forces of evil and gaining a decisive victory. God, in the person of Jesus Christ, defeated the devil and thereby released man from the bondage into which his sinful rebellion had brought him. What God has done historically through Christ's life, death, and resurrection He does continually in the act of justification.

In two respects Luther's view of the atonement goes beyond the pattern of the classic type as observed in the patristic period. He includes the law and the wrath of God among the tyrants which are overcome. They are tyrants inasmuch as they demand and condemn. They are hostile to God's purpose inasmuch as they tend to increase man's egocentric striving for favor with God. The devil and hell are able to threaten with death because they can point to the law and wrath of God for support. In the atonement and in justification these tyrants are overcome by Christ. He both fulfilled the law and destroyed it, and thereby overcame the judgment against man represented by God's wrath. In the atonement God's love conquered over His wrath and in justification the same conflict and the same victory become temporary realities.

The evidence upon which the Swedish students base their judgment that Luther's atonement theory belongs to the classic type

is twofold. There is the dramatic imagery, such as the fish-bait through which the devil is deceived and captured, the language of the battlefield, and similar representations. And there is the consistency between this interpretation of the atonement and other areas of his theology. On the other hand, a forensic interpretation requires the introduction of a legal conception of Christianity which is at odds with Luther's total theology.

A third focus of attention in the Swedish pattern of interpretation is *agape*. This defines God's nature and activity. *Agape* is divine love, receiving its definition from God's revelation of Himself. *Eros* is human love and is defined according to human standards. Nygren, in his monumental study, *Agape and Eros*, gives a clear and comprehensive definition of the meaning and implications of the two ideas and traces their history from the New Testament period through Luther. He makes two sweeping assertions regarding Luther's theology. He completely destroys the *caritas*-synthesis which characterized medieval theology and had its origin in Augustine, and he reconstructs the original Christian conception of *agape*. Nygren admits that Luther does not use the terms *eros* and *agape* nor does he "consciously seem to have considered the problem of love from this point of view."² What makes it possible for him to make Luther the champion of *agape* is the identification of *agape* with a theocentric interpretation of Christianity and *eros* with an egocentric view of man's relation to God. When Luther objects to the idea of merit, he is objecting to *eros*. When he asserts justification by faith, he is asserting *agape*. The key to Luther's interpretation of Christian love is found in the twenty-eighth thesis of the Heidelberg Disputation of 1518. There he says in part, "The love of God does not find, but creates, its lovable object; man's love is caused by its lovable object."³ Although the terms *eros* and *agape* do not occur, Nygren feels that the whole passage contains "one of the clearest delimitations of Eros and Agape, and the most apt description of the deepest characteristics of each."⁴ On the basis of this passage and numerous other expressions on the subject, it is possible to describe five positive characteristics of Luther's view of love which clearly bear the stamp of *agape*. (1) "Christian love is spontaneous in contrast to all activity with a eudaemonistic motive."⁵ (2) It is

spontaneous, in contrast to all legalism. (3) It is a *quellende Liebe*, having no motivation outside of itself and the inner fellowship with God from which it is derived. (4) Since it is not motivated by the worth of its object, it makes no distinction between persons but is offered alike to friend and foe, saint and sinner. (5) It is not even motivated by what is hoped to accomplish in another. It is prepared to fail.

The fundamental difference between Luther's view of fellowship with God and the view which characterized medieval theology is that for him fellowship comes into being at man's level—that is, on the basis of man's sin—rather than on God's level—that is, on the basis of man's holiness. This is a statement of the case which frequently occurs in Nygren's works and represents a typical Swedish position.

A certain tension exists between *agape*, on the one hand, and the emphasis upon the dualistic and dramatic interpretation of the atonement on the other. The love that surrenders and the power that wins seem to exclude one other. This is, however, not the case. *Agape* defines the power which overcomes the devil and accomplishes the atonement. Christ overcomes the tyrants by creating fellowship with sinners through forgiveness. The basic fact about God, according to the Swedish interpretation of Luther, is that He justifies sinners. This is the final evidence of the sovereignty of *agape*.

Agape is also the definition and dynamic of all Christian ethics. This may be regarded as a fourth focus of attention or area of interest in the Swedish pattern of interpretation. On the one hand, Swedish theology is anxious to distinguish clearly between ethics and religion; on the other hand, it seeks to arrive at a conception of Christian ethics which is wholly determined by Christian faith. *Agape* accomplishes both results. It guards against the ethicizing of religion. Luther's conception of love leads him to deny all religious value to ethical conduct even when this is an expression of Christian faith. As *sola fides* excludes all thought of merit from justification, so *simul iustus et peccator* excludes all thought of merit from the ensuing Christian life. The believer can never point to anything in his life which does not need forgiveness. This does not imply that he can not do any socially use-

ful act. It means that he can not transcend his egocentricity except as he constantly receives forgiveness for being egocentric.

This clear demarcation between religion and ethics does not involve any depreciation of ethics. In the judgment of Swedish students it is as much in the interest of ethics as of religion. The egocentric inclination which seeks religious merit for its ethical achievements is the greatest obstacle to any genuine ethical achievement. One is not wholly good as long as he seeks to use his goodness as a means to some other end. Because *agape* releases man from the necessity of having an ulterior purpose in his goodness, even though it be a lofty purpose, it leaves him free to serve the neighbor for the neighbor's sake. Furthermore, the character of the service which the Christian owes his neighbor is precisely defined by the Christ-deed. The Christian's love toward others is to be as spontaneous and unconditional as God's love toward him. This is, however, not merely an ideal. In accepting forgiveness, man allows his life to be dominated by God. He becomes theocentric. God acts through him so that his love is God's own love. *Agape* creates the fellowship between God and man and it creates the fellowship between men. Christian religion and Christian ethics are but two aspects of God's redeeming love.

The implications of Luther's view of Christian ethics for the practical concerns of life have been the object of several studies. These are characterized by the emphasis upon the earthly calling as the point at which Christian faith and life penetrate the social structure. The relation between *iustitia civilis*, *iustitia christiana*, and *iustitia actualis* has been investigated. The most recent study finds both civil righteousness and Christian righteousness to be actual righteousness conferred by God. The distinction between the two is that in the former the righteousness attaches to the office while in the latter it belongs to the individual.

A fifth area of interest in the Swedish interpretation is revelation and faith. The dynamic view of revelation has already been described. Swedish students are convinced that this is Luther's characteristic understanding of it. Revelation does not consist of a set of teachings, but it is God's direct and personal confrontation of the individual in the present. Faith is not assent to static doctrine but man's receptivity to God's direct and personal ap-

proach. It is a decisive surrender to the sovereignty of God, which is identical with saying that it is the acceptance of forgiveness. The emphasis upon the personal and contemporary character of revelation and faith does not lead to subjectivism. The theocentric character of the Swedish interpretation and the definitive character of the historical Christ-deed both for revelation and faith makes such an outcome impossible.

Luther's polemic against reason is not regarded as evidence that revelation is necessarily irrational in the sense that it involves logical contradictions. The proper antithesis is between reason and faith, not between reason and revelation. Reason is an expression of egocentricity and is therefore the opposite of faith. The whole of revelation is paradoxical in the sense that it is in conflict with man's self-interest and contradicts his own way of salvation, but this does not mean that every statement of faith must involve theoretical contradictions.

Luther's conception of the church was early made the object of research on the part of Swedish students. It is impossible to give a comprehensive picture of the Swedish type of interpretation without reference to this final area of interest. Revelation and the church are correlative concepts in Swedish theology and Luther interpretation. God's on-going activity, through which He reveals Himself to men and produces faith, creates the church. Aulén says: "The church of Christ is, according to its inmost being, a gospel-created fellowship. Where the gospel is active, there is also the church of Christ—die Gemeinschaft der Heiligen—there it is constantly created and maintained."⁶ In the Roman church the hierarchy and in the sectarian movements immediate religious experience supplant the gospel as the determinative element in the church. This is Luther's fundamental objection to them. Since it is the product of the gospel, the boundaries of the church can never be determined. It is a spiritual reality and as such is an object of faith, the certainty of its existence resting on the conviction that the gospel can not be without fruit. It is not merely a spiritual reality, however. Swedish research finds a necessary institutional element in Luther's view of the church. The Word and the sacraments, through which the church is created, must be proclaimed and administered. Therefore the church be-

comes visible and institutional. If Luther had not seen this close relation between the spiritual reality and the institution, he would not have attempted to reform the institution. Aulén concludes that "Luther has created a concept of the church which is unified as to its principle, and which combines reality with ideality, or more exactly stated, which is able at once to keep in view the church's character as an object of faith and the actuality of its historical fellowship."⁷

Swedish research has disavowed any attempt to produce a synthesis of Luther's theology but it has, nevertheless, given a remarkably unified and coherent pattern of interpretation. One of the most significant presentations of this organic unity is Aulén's "dynamic synthesis." He finds a unity which does not require any compromise of the tensions in his thought. The synthesis is achieved by emphasizing the tensions rather than by removing them. The antitheses between wrath and love, love and power, power and dualism, the hidden God and the revealed God, nearness and distance—all of these are united in the dynamic synthesis. The more man comes to know God's love, the more he realizes God's unconditional opposition to evil—that is, God's wrath. The more one becomes conscious of the reality of sin, the more incomprehensible becomes His forgiving love. Wrath and love do not exist at the expense of one another but mutually support one another. God's power is the power of His love. Dualism does not limit His power; on the contrary, His power is revealed in His victory over all that opposes Him. God is hidden in His revelation. The incomprehensible fact is that God reveals Himself as one who forgives sinners. Luther can stress the intimate, personal union with God at the same time that he stresses the holiness and otherness of God. The closer God comes to the believer, the more he realizes the immeasurable distance which separates the sinner from the holy God. Every religious motif is allowed to assert itself unhindered. The revelation of God is as filled with tensions as the life of faith, and as unified.

The same characteristic features of the Swedish pattern of interpretation appear in several studies of Luther's inner development and personality. They may be traced also in the Swedish view of Luther's relation to medieval theology and his originality

over against Roman Catholicism. The period of Orthodoxy is evaluated on the basis of the same general position. In the judgment of Swedish students, Orthodoxy reverted to the scholastic method of medievalism and to the judicial framework of medieval theology. It, therefore, failed to preserve the creative and revolutionary insights of Luther.

IV. *The Originality and Distinctiveness of the Swedish Interpretation of Luther*

In order to ascertain the originality of the Swedish interpretation, it is necessary to investigate the historical relationships between Luther research in Germany and the Luther renaissance in Sweden. There is evidence that some of the emphases which characterize the recent interpretation of Luther in both Sweden and Germany appear first in Sweden. Nevertheless, it is clear that the principal impetus for revitalized Luther research in Sweden came from Albrecht Ritschl. His influence is evident in Pehr Eklund, in the final decade of the nineteenth century, and in Söderblom and Billing, the two great pioneers in Swedish Luther study during this century. In the case of Billing, the influence of Ritschl is mediated through Herrmann. Ritschl led Swedish theology back to Luther, but Luther has led Swedish theology away from Ritschl. The Swedish interpretation is advanced in almost direct opposition to the whole theological view for which Ritschl is responsible. Historical dependence upon Ritschl does not mean that the Swedish interpretation is Ritschlian.

In order to ascertain the distinctiveness of the Swedish interpretation, it is necessary to compare the structure of the Swedish interpretative pattern with that of leading German Luther students. A basis for such a comparison is found in Otto Wolff's *Haupttypen der neueren Lutherdeutung*, published in 1938.⁸ Wolff analyzes five leading types of interpretation as represented by J. C. K. Hofmann (1810-1877), Theodosius Harnack (1817-1889), Albrecht Ritschl (1822-1889), Reinhold Seeberg (1859-1935), and Karl Holl (1866-1926). For the purposes of this summary it must suffice to indicate similarities and differences between these and the Swedish type.

Despite superficial similarities between Hofmann's interpreta-

tion and that of the Swedish students, there is no evidence that he has had any influence upon Swedish research. His theology focuses attention upon the Christian rather than upon the objective revelation. There is a *Kampf-motif* in Hofmann's view of the atonement but it is limited to the historical event of Christ's death. The victory has been accomplished; it is not being constantly won in contemporary faith. The dualistic element which appears in the interpretation of the atonement is lacking in the interpretation of justification. In Hofmann's emphasis upon "Christ in us" there is a tendency toward subjectivism and perfectionism. The essential difference between him and the Swedish students is that he does not carry through his dualism consistently. This is more than a difference at one point; it affects the whole interpretation of Luther.

Harnack's work is historically much more important than that of Hofmann. His basic interpretative principle is that all the antitheses in Luther's thought can be reduced to one. This consists in the twofold relationship to God in which man may stand—*ausser Christo* and *in Christo*. Outside of Christ man has a natural knowledge of God because of the law written in his heart. The law of Moses merely clarifies this law within. The law, the wrath of God, reason, and *deus absconditus* belong to the *ausser Christo* relationship. Revelation, gospel, love, and *deus revelatus* belong to the *in Christo* relationship. These two relationships really represent two ways of knowing God and both constitute true knowledge, since they have their counterparts in God's own nature. They are not to be harmonized but are to be allowed to remain in a state of tension with one another.

The Swedish view of Luther is also filled with tensions but they are handled in quite a different way. Whereas Harnack attempts to hold fast to both members of an antithesis by keeping them entirely distinct, Swedish students attempt to hold both by interpreting the one in relation to the other, or by merging the two into a single tension-filled concept so as to discover a unity which will allow the conflicting motifs to assert themselves unhindered. For instance, the wrath of God can not be separated from His love and referred to man's relationship to God outside of Christ. It is an intrinsic element in love as revealed to faith.

Only the man who is in Christ can be fully aware of God's wrath. Similarly, only one who sees God revealed in the Christ-deed can realize the incomprehensible nature of His love. Although Harnack disavows any intention to harmonize love and wrath, or any other antithesis in Luther's thought, he can not avoid a comparison between them. The one must be fundamental, and he is convinced that love must be so designated. Since love and wrath are totally distinct, to say that one is more essential than the other is to assert the one at the expense of the other. In the Swedish synthesis, love includes wrath so that the emphasis upon love is also an emphasis upon wrath. Harnack holds the satisfaction view of the atonement, although he is aware of dramatic elements in Luther's interpretation of it. In spite of his assertion that love is the essential character of God, his view of the atonement tends to give first place to wrath and law. The fundamental difference between Harnack and the Swedish students may be summarized thus: Harnack divides Luther's theology into two parts, neither of which is to infringe upon the other, and thereby he makes both of them relative. Swedish Luther interpretation unites these two parts into a single tension-filled unity and thereby avoids the necessity of making either one relative.

Ritschl's influence upon Swedish Luther research has already been indicated. Although contemporary theology in Sweden is sharply critical of Ritschl, it would not be difficult to point out numerous similarities with respect to particular ideas. The intimate connection between justification and ethical conduct, the idea of the "calling," the emphasis upon the Christian fellowship, and the centrality of love—these appear in both types. Nevertheless, the total patterns are far removed from one another. This will become clear if one compares Ritschl's three criticisms of Luther with the corresponding Swedish interpretation of the same elements in his theology. Ritschl's first criticism is that Luther never arrives at a unified conception of God and points to *The Bondage of the Will* in support of this judgment. On the other hand, Aulén finds the richness of Luther's concept of God in its tension-filled character. What Ritschl regards as a fault, Aulén considers a virtue. His second criticism is the emphasis upon the wrath of God. He holds that there is no objective counterpart

in God to the experience of wrath. Swedish students include wrath within the concept of love and assert that it does have an objective counterpart in God. His third criticism is that Luther fails to relate justification and the consequent ethical life. To Ritschl, justification is a means to an end, namely, the ethical fulfillment of God's purposes. His ultimate purpose is the establishment of a "universal moral Kingdom of God." The Swedish students also insist on the intimate relationship between justification and the consequent life, but the relationship between the two is not that of means and end. Justification involves the overcoming of egocentricity through God's forgiveness and consequently all of life becomes subject to the sovereign activity of God's love. The fundamental difference between Ritschl and the Swedish interpretation, in the final analysis, is a difference between optimistic monism and tension-filled dualism.

Swedish Luther research does not seem to be greatly indebted to Reinhold Seeberg's extensive research. The infrequent references to him are almost entirely critical. The speculative and psychological character of his interpretation is at odds with the Swedish emphasis upon a historical-systematic approach. The most inclusive distinction between the two types is that the Swedish interpretation is full of tensions, while in Seeberg all the tensions have been removed. Behind a large number of particular differences between them that could be noted is the fundamental fact that Seeberg interprets Luther from the viewpoint of monistic idealism. His total interpretation is, therefore, typologically irreconcilable with the Swedish dualistic view.

Karl Holl's influence in Sweden seems to be increasing. The younger theologians particularly make frequent references to his work. They appreciate his systematic approach and agree with his theocentric emphasis. Bring's interpretation of Luther's experience is almost identical with that of Holl. Aulén's attempt to arrive at the unity within the contrasts in Luther's thought is identical with Holl's purpose, although the results are not entirely the same. Swedish theology also stresses the sternness of God's wrath and its enduring presence in the life of faith. There is partial agreement also in the interpretation of justification. When the sinner affirms the will of God expressed in His condemning judg-

ment, he also affirms His forgiving love and thereby becomes a new creature.

This does not imply, however, that the two types are identical, or even similar. The theocentric emphasis in Holl expresses itself in terms of "oughtness." In the Swedish interpretation, it takes the form of *agape*. In Holl's view, wrath dominates; in the Swedish view, love dominates. While there is general agreement that *Rechtfertigung* and *Gerechtmachung* belong together, the manner in which the relation between the two is presented by Holl is criticized. Holl holds that justification would be a matter of caprice unless God could actually make the man whom He justifies righteous. When He declares man righteous, He is really making a pronouncement concerning His own reliability. What God has begun He will accomplish. This seems to mean that God can forgive man because He can be relied on to produce a condition in man which justifies His forgiveness. The Swedish view of justification does not allow any motivation for God's forgiveness.

In the estimation of Swedish scholars, Holl has not overcome the Kantian-Ritschlian approach. They feel the picture of God is ethicized and rationalized in a manner which prevents love from dominating the whole. God's majesty is defined in terms of ethical power rather than in terms of forgiving love. Nygren's *agape* and Holl's *das Sollen* are not correlative terms.

The above comparison with various German types of interpretation makes it possible to isolate five distinctive features in the Swedish pattern. These are (1) the method of motif-research, (2) the dualistic background of the total interpretation, (3) the dynamic-dramatic view of revelation, (4) the prominence of the doctrine of the church, and (5) the determinative character of *agape*. Motif-research must be regarded as the particular contribution of Aulén, Nygren, and other contemporary Lundensians. The dualistic emphasis and the dynamic-dramatic element are, respectively, the contributions of Nathan Söderblom and Einar Billing. The conception of the church and the dominance of *agape* represent revivals of something deep in the Swedish tradition.

V. *The Validity of the Swedish Interpretation of Luther*

The question of validity must be directed toward the five distinctive features of the Swedish type which have been isolated above. It must be admitted that the method of motif-research is admirably suited to discover precisely the sort of integrated pattern of thought which Swedish students have found in Luther's theology. In part the result is the product of the method employed. This, however, does not invalidate either the method or the results. The alternatives to a systematic-historical approach are the purely historical and the psychological. Both have a place but neither can yield significant results for theology. The historical facts, including the theological utterances, must be interpreted and this necessarily involves some interpretative principle of a systematic nature. Unless this is derived from the historically given material, it will be imported from the interpreter's own world.

But is there a central affirmation which is at the heart of every particular position which Luther holds? If one seeks a logically constructed system of ideas in Luther, he is surely looking for something which is not to be found, and the Swedish students have helped to undermine any such expectation. The coherence which Swedish research seeks, and claims to have found, is not a coherence of ideas but a coherence of faith. It seeks a central affirmation rather than a central idea. Such a center there seems to be.

The dualistic character of Luther's theology is attested by almost every student of his thought. Hofmann acknowledges its importance in the interpretation of the atonement. Ritschl considers it a remnant of medievalism which must be expunged from his theology. Harnack seeks to reduce it to an epistemological dualism; Seeberg to a psychological dualism. They thereby bear witness to the existence of something in Luther's theology which can not be interpreted in terms that are completely monistic. Holl is less concerned to explain away Luther's dualism but he does not make extensive use of it. The Swedish interpretation is able to give full value to it by making it the background in the light of which his entire position must be understood. The correlation between egocentricity, flesh, and unbelief appears to be well established by both German and Swedish research. The additional correlation

between these concepts and the objective rule of the devil seems to be a fairly distinctive Swedish contribution. It is this which makes the devil so important to Luther. He is terrifying because he is as real and as near as man's self-centeredness. On the other hand, man's perversion becomes more serious because it is rooted in an objective evil will. Whatever may be the final validity of a dualistic view, the Swedish students have quite definitely established the necessity of understanding Luther against such background.

If the dualistic interpretation of Luther's conception of sin is valid, it follows almost of necessity that his solution to the human problem must also be dualistic. The dynamic-dramatic character of revelation is the counterpart of the dynamic-dramatic character of sin. The devil invades the field of human activity. It is quite evident that Luther places a high estimate on the extent and effectiveness of his aggression. God's redemptive revelation of Himself must then be understood as a parallel counter-activity. He seeks to dislodge the devil at the point where his dominion touches us most closely, that is, our egocentricity.

It must be admitted that this view of revelation can not be credited solely to Swedish Luther research. It first appears in other areas of Swedish thought. It may, nevertheless, have its roots in the enduring Swedish Lutheran tradition. God's contemporary activity through the proclamation of the gospel, the folk-church, and the idea of the "calling" has always been a part of the Swedish emphasis and seems to be derived from the early Reformation impulses coming from Luther. It is true that he sometimes seems to rest his case upon a literalistic interpretation of certain Bible passages, as in the controversy over the Lord's Supper. The period of Orthodoxy is not wholly unjustified in appealing to Luther in support of a static, intellectualistic view of revelation. But if one takes a larger view of Luther's interpretation of the Word of God, it is clear that the emphasis is upon God's contemporary activity. The *Lectures on Romans* offers much support for the dramatic character of that contemporary activity.

Several questions must be raised concerning the "Christus Victor" interpretation of the atonement. Does it do justice to

Luther's emphasis upon guilt and forgiveness? Is there sufficient room for the idea of satisfaction within the dramatic framework? Is the atonement objective in the same sense as Luther's view of it? At the present moment it would seem that the burden of proof rests upon those who answer these questions negatively. The Swedish students have amassed an impressive body of supporting evidence for their dramatic interpretation. Unless it can be shown that this can be incorporated within the framework of a judicial view of the atonement, their conclusions can not be denied.

The Swedish interpretation of Luther's conception of the church stands or falls with the dynamic view of revelation. The most impressive evidence in support of both is the way in which these cohere with his total thought and activity. His reformation of the church was, at the same time, a reassertion of the Word, grace, forgiveness, and justification. These are clearly the positive elements in his reforming activity. It may be questioned, however, whether he consistently adhered to this conception in the practical realm. At times his relations with the German nobility seem to suggest a state church view rather than the more self-sufficient, spiritual folk-church view.

The Swedish emphasis upon *agape* as the basic-motif in Christianity does not imply that it is the only legitimate element in Christian thought and life. The task which Swedish theology has set for itself is the isolation and interpretation of the distinctive, essential character of Christianity. The idealistic synthesis of the nineteenth century has obscured its uniqueness. Swedish theology returns to Luther to shatter the idealistic synthesis as Luther returned to Paul to shatter the medieval, scholastic synthesis.

If it is merely a question of determining the basic-motif, it is difficult to deny that *agape* is entitled to that designation. However, Nygren goes farther than this and asserts that Luther's view is "wholly determined by the Agape motif. We look in vain here for any single feature of Eros."⁹ This judgment must be questioned. There is a line of thought in Luther, particularly in the *Lectures on Romans*, which seems to qualify as *eros* much more easily than as *agape*. Alongside the movement from God to man is an unutterable yearning (*Sehnsucht*) from the side of man to-

ward God. The deeds of the saints are righteous only in as far as they involve a sighing (*Seufzen*) for God and His grace. They must be offered to God in hope; they do not entitle the saint to any claim upon Him. As the sculptor is heeding the unuttered desire of the block of marble for form and beauty, so God is having compassion upon man in view of his longing and desire. This longing does not end when man is justified. It is an enduring feature of Christian faith. This element in Luther's theology does not invalidate the fundamental importance of *agape* but it does raise some doubt concerning the absoluteness of the distinction which Nygren draws.

The total picture which Swedish students have given is unified and integrated, despite the analytical character of most of their studies. Perhaps it is too unified. At times one feels that Luther is too finished. He carries through his basic-motif too consistently. It is not difficult to see the reason for this. As systematic theologians they are not merely studying Luther's theology. They are concerned with the basic-motif of Christianity. One might say that Swedish systematic theology, New Testament interpretation, and Luther research are all aspects of one single pattern. This does not invalidate the interpretation of Luther. It may very well be that Luther, the prophet of evangelical Christianity, can only be understood when he is allowed to join hands with Paul on the one side and the contemporary preacher on the other. His significance must lie in the fundamental Christian affirmation which found expression in him.

Whether or not the Swedish interpretation of Luther can claim to encompass all of Luther, it does account for more of his thought than most interpretations have done. Thus far the work of Swedish students has been largely analytical. The work of synthesis has only begun, but it holds rich promise for the future. The highly refined method of motif-research, the distinctive Swedish Lutheran tradition, the vast amount of analytical study, and the systematic inclination and capacity of Swedish scholars qualify them to provide the world with a "theology of Luther" which shall be as inclusive as it already is profound.

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- ² A. Nygren, *Agape and Eros*, trans. Philip S. Watson (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1939). Part II, 474.
- ³ Quoted *ibid.*, p. 507.
- ⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 506 f.
- ⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 508.
- ⁶ G. Aulén, *Till belysning af den lutherska kyrkoidén, dess historia och dess värde* (Uppsala: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1912), p. 17.
- ⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 69.
- ⁸ O. Wolff, *Haupttypen der neueren Lutherdeutung* (Stuttgart-Berlin: Verlag von W. Kohlhammer, 1938).
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